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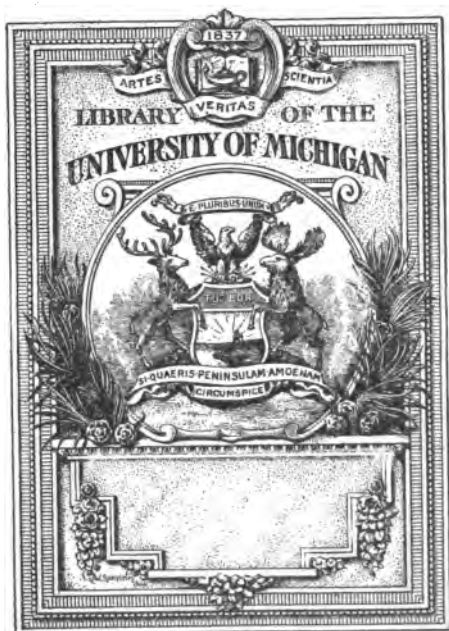
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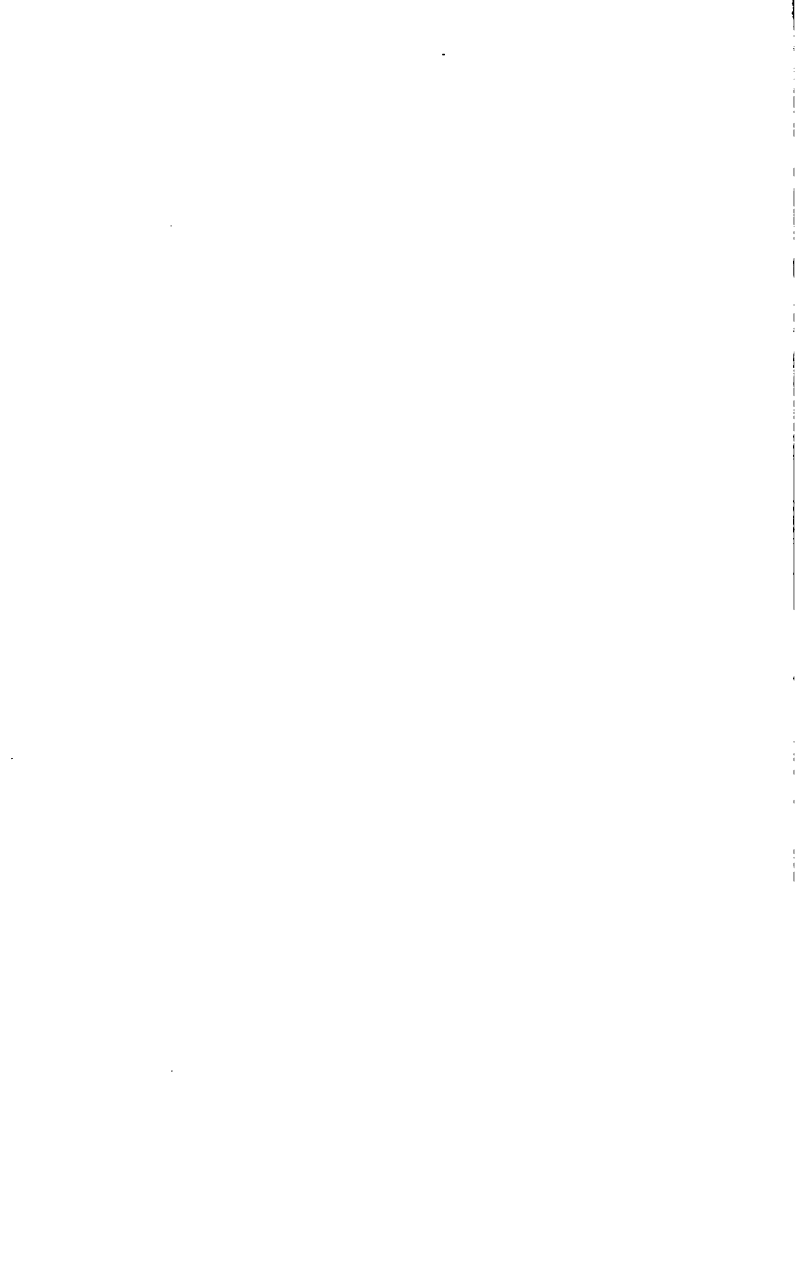
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BETWEEN THE LIGHTS



BETWEEN
THE LIGHTS

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BY

ALICE HERBERT

LONDON & NEW YORK
JOHN LANE. MDCCCIII.

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DEDICATION

*To one who will not read my book ;
Whom neither song can reach, nor any tears ;
I dedicate it, with a farewell look
Back through long, bitter, dim, forsaken years.*



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The Widow

MOONLIGHT on the almond tree and moonlight
on your face—

Oh, listen! in the quiet of your white and awful
place.

If I leave the little children that you laid upon
my breast,

Come to seek you—shall I find you? will you
tell me, you who rest?

While you lived, while you lived, did I often
turn and leave you?

Did I hold the sunshine lightly till it faded from
the sky?



The Widow

It has left a bitter darkness. Come again, and
if I grieve you,
Yon may take your great revenge again, beloved
—you may die.

I have sinned against the light : for I have always
understood.

I have known the mean and sullied from the
lovely and the good.

Heart and soul of me could read you : and I read
and turned away.

But I never turned so far and lay so cold as you
to-day.

Can you hear, can you hear, can you feel my
longing hand ?

Are you too far for pity in your cruel silent
land ?

The Widow

When did you ever pray to me with eyes that
longed to weep ?

Have they made you stony-hearted that you care
not, you who sleep ?

Nay, I know—laugh to know—that you never
can go free !

There is no heaven sweet enough to drown your
need of me.

Under the very smile of God you listen for my
voice.

Will they let you hear its breaking when they
bid you to rejoice ?

For me with all my folly, and for me with all
my sin,

You would wait with heaven before you and
refuse to enter in.

The Widow

And I, for just one hour of you, to feel your
touch again,

Would give—O words, O dreams, how late!
how utterly in vain!

Spring the Guest

SPRING, thou art bidden to my hour of hours !
Rest no more hidden with the year's first flowers.
Throw back thy veil, the clinging envious mist.
Let violets kiss thy footprints as they list.

Come for one hour—my hour that brings to me
Joy all too short, and lifelong memory.
Then—as thou wilt ! My life shall pass away
Like wine poured out and spilt, one sweet Spring
day.

Unremembering Spring

SPRING is here, with the wind in her hair
And the violets under her feet.
All the forests have found her fair,
Lovers have found her sweet.

Spring's a girl in a lovely gown,
Little more than a child.
Bid her smile and the tears fall down;
Frown—and her laugh is wild.

Ay, for she has no heart, not she !
She will sing while you weep.
She wakes up without memory
Every year from her sleep.

Unremembering Spring

While she slept we have lost our all.

Then she wakes and is glad.

Cries to us to come at her call—

Wonders “Why are ye sad?”

Stands by graves in the dress of a bride—

“Drear is the song ye sing!”

If we tell her that men have died,

“What is death?” says the Spring.

Spring, pass by, we have lived too long!

Take the primrose and go,

Lest you learn from a mortal's song

All that the mortals know.

The Stranger

WHAT have you seen, to blind your eyes to
mine,

What mystic light along a shore of doom ?
Where have you drunk of that enchanted wine
Born of the grape that knows no earthly bloom ?

Why do you come with mortal words to me
Which human lovers use ? While yet you hold
The echoes of no mortal memory
In your still voice that turns the silence cold.

I have no part in all that you have known.
Strange waters touch my feet but pass them by.
You dream of some far dawn you watched alone.
Earth-bound and passion-tossed and woman am I !

To One Beloved

If you could only understand !
How quick the kindly, careless hand
Would be to comfort, if you knew
My piteous human need of you !

Ah, but before you feel for me,
You must have lain with Misery.
Kind heart, dear face, dear eyes, dear hand,
Thank God you cannot understand !

Autumn

SUMMER to me is fairest in her death,
When thick the leaves fall on her quiet face.
No more she laughs with triumph in her breath.
Her spirit sighs in every wooded place.

No more her sunshine mocks my twilight way.
The heavy rose is withered at her breast.
Her songs are sung. Their echoes die away,
Too far, too faint, to wake the old unrest.

Summer and I are sisters now at last.
We have lived golden days and seen them die.
Now all the old, sad hopes are dreamed and past,
We may fold hands for sleeping, she and I.

Yet only half can Summer share my sorrow.
I have her yesterday—but not her morrow.

“ Few passions can outlive a little
song ”

When Memory comes teasing you,
Trying to break your heart,
Telling of things that used to be,
And how you bore a part,
The safest Lethe you can drink
(You'll never find it wrong)
Is just the little drop of ink
That makes a little song.

When waking nights are heavy things
And Spring nights hard to bear ;
When every bird that sees you sings
A melancholy air :

"Few passions can outlive a little song"

**Then never dream and stray about
And shut your eyes and long,
But take a pen and work it out.
And make a little song.**

**Though every smile, however sweet,
Should make you sigh "If only . . .!"
And all the throng of passing feet
Should leave you more than lonely:
Though all your cry be "Come again!
The empty days are long,"
Perhaps you'll hardly find the pain
Outlive a little song!**

Love

WHAT can I sing of you, last, dearest, best ?
You, not my lover as the world counts love,
You, whose rare touch is such a sweet unrest,
That, fearing, it grows rarer. You who prove
In spite of all the world's sad wisdom told,
That Love can live, with all its earthly fire,
Yet unfulfilled. Not cold the lips—not cold,
That will not dare to drink of their desire.
Belovèd, if the sword that guards the door
Fell from our angel's hand and left it wide,
Should we dare enter? is it less or more
Of Paradise that lies the other side?
More than I give you could I hardly give:
More than I have I could not bear and live.

Passion

CLOSER and closer hold me, until pain
Fights hard with rapture. Now those lips
again . . .

Has life a fiercer joy to give than this—
The creeping fire of love's supremest kiss?
Open again your passion-darkened eyes.
I found them mirrors of serenest skies,
And leave them . . . what? Oh, I have
robbed a shrine

And slain a soul to make this moment mine!
Sin let it be. So much from God I win,
That I will dare to thank Him for the sin.
And though such thanks be greater sin, yet He
Who made you much too fair will pardon me!

Midwinter Night's Dream

How small a thing may be the heart's desire !
This could Life give me I could be content—
That, as I dream beside my whispering fire,
Dream with dimmed eyes on dying embers bent,
You came to me, and spoke no kindly word,
But let my fancy speak, that is too rife
With words that you will never say. Unheard
Have been the sweetest voices of my life.
That your beloved hand lay on my hair :
It need not cost you aught of tenderness,
For I could dream a lover's hand lay there
And taste all heaven in that cold caress.
. . . . The room grows darker round the
dying fire,
How small a thing may be the heart's desire !

Au Revenant

If you had come a year ago,
With just that voice and eyes as kind,
More had been saved than you can know
In these strange days we leave behind.

But now—be comrade to me, friend !
(Half-thanks for thy half-bounty, Fate !)
The days for loving have an end :
And joy may come a year too late.

An Old Answer

SCARCELY I heard it when I let you go.

"Will you forget me?" was the word you said.

I added nothing to my barren "No."

My joy had died. I turned to bury my dead.

But when your lost, imagined touch can thrill

My empty hands no more, their longing past,

Crossed shall they lie where sleeps, appeased and
still,

The heart that has forgotten you at last.

The Kiss

It would cost you little to give.
It would show me a glimpse of heaven.
But it may be, as long as I live,
That kiss will never be given.

One word would be harder to say,
One thought more bitter to bear—
That you should give it one day,
Should give it—and I not care!

“It is not well to talk with
ghosts”

It is not well to talk with ghosts. Their laughter
if a mortal hears

He learns to know what laughter is, how sadder
far a thing than tears.

It is not well to talk with ghosts. Their touch
is chill as winter rain,

But she who feels it on her heart will love no
other touch again.

It is not well to talk with ghosts. If mortal
woman's mouth they kiss,

God will not have her soul at all. But she will
give His heaven for this.

That which was Lost

A LOVER said, "I do not hate the years
That touch to grey the softness of her hair.
For me Remembrance leaves the sunlight there.

I love the lines that colder eyes than mine
Read on the spirit-fairness of her face.
The soul's handwriting tells its inward grace.

But once around her beauty, still so dear,
Blew an enchanted air: a mystery
That shook my heart, but kept its own from me.

That which was Lost

There was a secret hidden in her eyes,
And in her voice one note I thrilled to hear.
Have the years slain it ere I read it clear?"

Even as he spoke, her soft eyes met his own
And answered. For behind their love and truth
Shone the lost magic and immortal youth.

Hide Not Thy Face!

DRAW nearer to us, Lord, if but to slay !
So far Thou art, we are not even afraid
To look upon the thing that we have made
The soul of man to-day.

The hands by Thine made tender and made
strong
Are at our brother's throat, or crook'd with greed
For cozening the helpless in their need.
How long, O Lord, how long ?

Thine envoy Love we trampled to the dust,
And down the centuries still rings our cry—
The yell of "Crucify him ! crucify !
Release unto us Lust !"

Hide Not Thy Face!

Grant to our piteous need this much of grace—
Take back the breath that still we hold of Thee,
That shames us. Or redeem us utterly.

Hide not Thy face!

The Doubt

WHAT art thou, with hid eyes and quiet feet
Entering in and drawing—ah, so near !
Was ever voice but *one* so hushed and sweet
Or any touch so full of joy and fear ?

Do I not know thy name ? I breathe it low.
Oh, if thou art not he, come not so nigh !
Show not thy face, unless thy face I know.
If very Love thou art not, I shall die.

Free!

I HAVE set my heel on the thing that hurt me,
bought my ease of heart with its death,
Stilled the voice of its ceaseless grieving, silent
now with the silent breath.

Life at last is my own for living, filled with fruits
for my hand to take.

All too long I have lost its laughter, turned aside
for a sad thing's sake.

Peace at last, of the good world's giving, long
atonement for all the tears.

Other voices and other faces, swift forgetting of
grievous years . . .

Free!

**Yet—Alas, it was fair and holy, the love I killed
for a rest from pain!**

**Will there come a day and my heart be aching,
to feel it stir and to weep again?**

The Last Word

Now she is dead, all you who say you love her,
Ere you forget and pass and love again,
This be the parting word you breathe above her:
"No beauty ever lived for her in vain."

She loved the sin and sorrow of the city :
She loved the echoing woods and quiet sky.
Small good did she. But in her heart was pity
For all who live to suffer Life and die.

For her Life meant the stress of utmost living.
Wild was the heart that lies so still to-day.
She gave with such a joy of reckless giving
That we forgave her all she took away.

Blue Eyes

WHAT need have you of a heart or mind,
And who will ask of you to be human ?
Spring, who sent you, was far too kind
To make you a woman !

But He who has put such blue in His skies,
Such gems of blue in the hedge-bird's nest,
Will smile on the sweeter blue of your eyes,
And forgive you the rest !

The Joyous Suicide

GOOD-BYE, old World, so innocently vain
That all who leave you thus you find insane !
Life of the living, *sans rancune*, adieu !
Most that I asked for I have had from you.
Farewell, good Friendship ! Be your kindly grief
Decorously untempered with relief.
Sweet Love, farewell ! was that a breath, a sigh,
A light hand pleading "Tarry !" . . . No.
. . . Good-bye.

Farewell, my books ! you never failed me yet ;
Why mar my going with its first regret ?
Life's orchestra has played for me its best.
I leave the rout while still a welcome guest,
Bequeathing, Coroner—lugubrious friend !—
To you the dismal anthem at the end.

The Mistress

OH, who shall say forbidden love is sweet !
To have in all your life no lot, no part :
To know if you lay dead the tale would greet
My ears from careless lips : would strike my heart,
And no voice plead "Have pity ! for her life
Is ended with a life she loved to-day."
To hear you give that tender name of Wife
And not to me. To wear the hours away
In fevered dreaming : or to muse apart
On her, that sheltered, happier one than I,
Who fills the holy places of your heart . . .
And yet—O love forbidden !—Till I die,
The echo on my threshold of your feet
Will cry to me "Forbidden love is sweet !"

The Wood

THERE's a wood I will not enter in the autumn
of the year.

The bracken stands up, brown and gold, the
yellow stems are sere.

A wonderful deep silence holds the dim, enchanted
place,

Filled with the living memory of a dead, beloved
face.

All lovely as I left it I should find my wood again.

Ah, what a little thing to turn its beauty all to
pain!—

That I might long and listen till my heart forgot
to beat,

But the leaves would never whisper at the coming
of his feet.

Maya

("How can you tell that it is not all Maya, illusion?"—
WALT WHITMAN).

ONCE the bright sons of the gods
Looked on the daughters of men.
What is there left us of all we knew then?
Maya, illusion !

How could he see what is hid
If it were not so, the lover?
How could he say, "She alone and no other"?
Maya, illusion !

Many with eyes that are deep,
Many with lips that are sweet ;
One with your heart lying down at her feet.
Maya, illusion !

A Spring Song

YOUR love may go when skies are grey
(Too frail a thing for Winter's breath !),
Or when the gold and red decay
Of Autumn sighs of change and death.

But if you leave me now, my lover,
Now, while the mating thrushes sing
And violets breathe from every cover,
How shall I live and bear the Spring ?

The Wind from the Moon

A WHITE wind blows from the moon.

The night has a cry :

“Life, wild life, for the living ! Soon
They shall die.”

The mad wind blows on the brain

And your eyes are near,

And the old sin whispers and tempts again.

“Life is dear !”

The hot wind blows in the blood,

And it pulses fast.

Lover . . . belovèd . . . yield you to the flood—

“Life at last !”

Mirage

HE who has seen a city in the skies
Knows he may never cool his tired eyes
At the fair waters of that Paradise.

Let him press on or in the desert wait,
He shall not find his rest within the gate :
Strive or despair, he must be desolate.

But the one moment when he thought his feet
Would enter that dream-city was so sweet
That he can bear the noonday and its heat.

The Bargain

To you who fill up the world for me, I am only
one of a score,

Well, that is a bitter hearing, though I knew it
so well before.

But we all know best what we long for : and
you shall not break my heart.

I will stand by the cruel bargain. I will take
my twentieth part.

All you want of me is the touch that stirs, and
the face that seems to you fair.

For all that I give you with them you never
were born to care.

The Bargain

Well ! love me or do not love me—there is fire
in the cup I hold.

I will drink it down to the shallow dregs. I
will take your beads for my gold.

Defeat

WELL, I have played and lost. But that is best.
Where was my right to win and keep such glory?
Now I will let the book of living rest.
Closed is my story.

But not again shall April hours be fleet
Or ever April grass the snowdrops cover.
Good-bye life, song, delight, and all things sweet.
Good-bye, my lover !

To a Woman Friend

STRANGE little friend of many a year,
This is your birthday, dear, again !
And I sit thinking of you here
Thoughts touched with pity and with pain.

We have lived many lifetimes through
Since days the past brings back to me,
When all was golden dream to you
That now is bitter memory.

How much we wanted, I and you,
How little did we understand !
Life was unfathomed summer blue.
The future was enchanted land.

To a Woman Friend

We were to make our voices ring
Among the famous, you and I !
And now the kindest life can bring
Is sheltered silence till we die.

Our dream of dreams was nothing new.
Love and the High Romance and Truth
Life owed to me and owed to you.
(Alas, the dream, O days of youth !)

I took the best from Life in vain—
Half-prized it till it passed from me.
(If I could live the years again,
The wasted years, O Memory !)

You chose the worst, and thought it best.
I chose the best, and let it die.

To a Woman Friend

You long for joy and I for rest.
How we have missed life, you and I !

Your fairy prince, beneath the crown,
Showed but a mean and bestial face.
And mine has laid his sceptre down.
His kingdom is a quiet place.

Well . . . if our restless hearts and blood
Will let the future drown the past,
We may have both outlived the flood
And reached the harbour's calm at last.

A royal love has come in state
To meet your every wayward mood.
I like to know you safe from fate,
Cherished, protected, understood.

To a Woman Friend

The chain between us two, I think,
Is tougher than we well could break,
A dead man's hand its strongest link.
I love you for sad memory's sake.

And you ? Be all your thoughts of me
A little gentler than the truth,
Because of what we used to be
(And are no more, O days of youth !)

A Prayer

THOU who hast given me the ears to hear

Thy spirit-call:

And the weak feet that cannot bring me near,

But fail and fall:

Wilt Thou not heed how far my path is leading

From peace and Thee?

“Like as a father pitieth his children”

Pity Thou me!

Thou who hast given to my remembering eyes

One fairest sight:

And not the power to lift them to the skies

That have no night:

A Prayer

Wilt Thou not see how desolate my darkness—

How shut from Thee ?

“ Like as a father pitieth his children ”

Pity Thou me !

Thou who hast given me the heart to feel

The Love Divine,

And built the baser altar where I kneel—

The lower shrine :

Wilt *Thou* condemn, that there I spent my wor-
ship,

Forgetting Thee ?

Own Thou Thy handiwork, forgive Thy child-
ren,

Pity Thou me !

Ingratitude

Not till the cruel roughening of the way :

Not till the hopeless tiring of the feet :

Not till the dusk and fading of the day,

Is home most sweet.

Not till our joy has turned to memory :

Not till our hearts are wearied-out with fasting,

Do we lift beaten hands and cry to thee,

Life everlasting !

The Parting of the Ways

ONCE, when the evening twilight leaned to me,
A sudden anguish shook me, and I cried
With prayer and tears, "Thy face, O Mystery !
Once to have seen thy face before I died !

"To hear thy footstep, and to know it thine :
To feel upon my lips thy mystic fire—
Where have I known thee, in a life not mine,
That this my life is spoiled with thy desire ?"

Low to my spirit came the answer then :
"Thine eyes and eyes of mine shall never meet.
Thy dreams are of the sullied loves of men :
Pure and withdrawn the lips that touch my feet."

The Parting of the Ways

"Let me have love," I said, "a little while !
Poor human love that lives a summer's day !
Austere, immortal, is thy wondrous smile :
But warmer lips will smile and pass away."

"Nay—when thy lovers leave thee, bleak of
heart,
To kneel at my high altar unashamed ?
Choose now and steadfastly—the earthly part,
Or the white vision of the shrine unnamed."

"I will be thine—heart, soul, and all of me !"
I cried aloud, and lifted up my eyes :
But mortal eyes met mine : and I could see
No dream but theirs in all the evening skies.

Lullaby

SLEEP soft and long, no morn is worth the waking.
The world has tears for waking eyes to weep.
Beat soft and strong, dear heart too small for
breaking.

Little one, gentle one, sleep !

Out in the rain lies one who will not waken.
Out in the night lies one whose dreams are deep.
What can it mean to you, the word "forsaken ?"

Little one, laughing one, sleep !

A Song of Worship

Oh, she is music and soft airs and evening-bells
upon a wind

That blows from far, fair lands, where dreaming
waters whisper peace !

And when her footstep passes by, the echo that
it leaves behind

Will linger with my spirit when all other echoes
cease.

She is as far above me as the sunrise in the sky.
But all my life, because of her, shall hold but
this of fame.

I have not touched her shadow as she passed me
—no, not I.

But I have seen her eyes and heard her voice and
loved her name.

A Song of Memory

MEMORY sleeps beside my chamber door.

Hush, for her sake,

Lest she should hear and be at peace no more :

Lest she should wake.

Memory stirs and whispers in her sleep.

What does she say ?

Was it a name I gave her once to keep

Hid from the day ?

Dim in the shadow is her bright hair's gleam :

Faint is her voice.

If she should fade from life in her long dream,

Should I rejoice ?

A Song of Memory

I should not hear the footsteps of the years

Over her head.

I should be passed from joy and safe from tears.

I should be dead.

The Difference

BUILT but of common stone the arch may be
To the chance traveller's unseeing eyes,
But through it once a vision shone for me—
The dream-begotten hills of Paradise.

Yours is a merely human charm and grace
To others whom you suffer not so near.
But I have seen your spirit face to face.
Dead, marred, forsaken, I should find you fair.

The Choice

ALL men meet with a choice to-day—
Peace at last, or the heart's wish here.
I chose you, with the price to pay.

Why not, my dear ?

I have taken what pleased me best.
What is left to regret or fear ?
Live for one day—pay with the rest—

Why not, my dear ?

The Boon

IF I could whisper Fortune in the ear,
I would not pray for Fame, or sin forgiven.
One unforgotten day of a dead year
To live again, is all I ask of heaven.

O first day of my life that was the last !
Its second dawning should not end in sorrow.
Until it blessed me I would hold it fast :
But it should have no nightfall—and no morrow.

A Question

SHE whom you love is full of gentleness.
Her voice that answers yours is moonlight mild.
Her hands are tender, and their touches bless.
Her eyes look sweetly, like a worshipped child.

But tell me, though you love me not at all,
Are there no fevered wakings that you fear,
When in the quiet room wild memories call
With fiercer voice than hers who sleeps so near ?

And do you turn, belovèd, from her rest
To my impassioned waking and its pain ?
And though her head has lain upon your breast,
Has the night given you to me again ?

The Serious Word

AM I never earnest, do you ask me ?
Is my gravest always touched with jest ?
Friend of mine, I learned the lesson hardly ;
Life has roughly taught me smiles are best.

When I turn the graver for your coming :
When your going costs me half a sigh :
You shall have the earnest word you ask for.
It shall be the wisest word—Goodbye !

September Song

FALL of the leaf, you whisper at my window.

Fall of the year, you whisper at my heart.

Leaf in the bud, you brought my joy-day with
you.

Year at the Spring, you saw my joy depart.

Song of the trees, my songs are sad for singing.

Stir of the wind upon the mountain's brow,

What is your cry ? what voices are you bringing ?

Love of a day, whose heaven are you now ?